

(Reprinted from the ***Timberline*** - Wisconsin DNR – Division of Forestry internal staff newsletter – 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2004 issue.)

## Return of the American Elm?

By Cindy Casey, Urban Forestry Coordinator, West Central Region, Eau Claire

Not only is American elm absent from most lists of recommended trees, planting one may invite penalties for violating local nuisance ordinances. But elm enthusiasts can take heart knowing that, after several decades of breeding for disease tolerance, American elms may soon return to street terraces, parks, backyards and semi-naturalized landscapes.

There are several true American elm cultivars (i.e., not crossed with Asian or European elms) that are considered variably Dutch elm disease tolerant. Commercial availability is increasing, but is still limited at this time. 'American Liberty' was released by the late Dr. E.B. Smalley of UW-Madison in 1986. The city of Rice Lake has successfully used 'American Liberty' in their parks for many years, and although the city has had good luck with it, it's important to realize that there are six different clones of this cultivar which vary in form and DED tolerance. Testing at the US National Arboretum reportedly resulted in only 18% overall survival. The cultivar is also reportedly susceptible to elm yellows-another fatal disease. 'American Liberty' is copyright protected and available only through the Elm Research Institute in Keene, NH. The institute offers an 'American Liberty' elm with a \$45 membership. Details are available on their Web site, [www.libertyelm.com/](http://www.libertyelm.com/) or 1-800-FOR-ELMS. (Be aware of claims and counterclaims concerning 'American Liberty' elm vs. 'Princeton' elm on the ERI Web site.)

An older cultivar, 'Princeton', reportedly has better form than 'American Liberty' and has fared much better in DED testing at the National Arboretum-a 96% survival and recovery rate, according to the July 2001 Journal of Environmental Horticulture. 'Princeton' is available from the Riveredge Farms Web site, [www.americanelm.com/](http://www.americanelm.com/).

Two very recent American elm introductions are just entering commercial production. 'Valley Forge' reportedly had 96% survival and 'New Harmony' had 86% survival after seven years of testing at the National Arboretum. Though the literature suggests 'Valley Forge' is hardy only to zone 5, consulting arborist and plant pathologist Mark Stennes has been growing one successfully in the Minneapolis area for four years.

According to Stennes, rooted cuttings from an American elm survivor near Afton, MN, (just over the border from Hudson, WI) are being propagated at the University of Minnesota for inclusion in future National Arboretum trials. Stay tuned for updates on 'St. Croix' elm.

For additional information about disease-tolerant American elms, visit [www.mv.com/ipusers/env/cultivars.html](http://www.mv.com/ipusers/env/cultivars.html).